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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0514**

May 13, 2015

Chairwoman Edith Ramirez  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20580

Dear Chairwoman Ramirez:

I am writing to request a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigation into the claims and advertising practices of therapists who administer so-called “conversion therapy,” in order to determine whether their practices are “unfair or deceptive.”<sup>1</sup> Conversion therapy is an attempt by mental health providers that seek to change an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Being transgender, gay, lesbian, or bisexual is not a disease to be cured or a mental illness that requires treatment. In spite of this fact, therapists continue to promise their “treatments” will change their patients, including children. Some patients are forced to put blocks of ice on their hands while they look at pictures of men holding hands, then provided relief from the pain only if they plead to see a picture of a man and woman holding hands. Other survivors are delivered electric shocks or intense heat. Still others are told to snap themselves with a rubber band every time they experience same-sex attraction.

When children and adults undergo these so-called “treatments,” they don’t come home from sessions “ex-gay” as their therapists promised. Instead, studies show that these abusive therapy practices pose critical health risks to their patients, including decreased self-esteem, confusion, guilt, shame, helplessness, hopelessness, social withdrawal, and substance abuse. The statistics are frightening: Conversion therapy patients are 5.9 times more likely than their “un-treated” LGBT peers to report depression, and 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>2</sup> These are the statistics you won’t find on a “conversion” therapist’s website or brochure.

The medical and mental health communities have been clear for years on the effects of conversion therapy. It doesn’t work, and harms children and adults. Many medical organizations have made official statements on the dangers of conversion therapy, including the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association Governing Council, the

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<sup>1</sup> 15 U.S.C. § 57a

<sup>2</sup> Ryan, Caitlin et al. “Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults.” *Pediatrics*, Vol. 123 No. 1, January 1, 2009.  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/1/346.abstract>

American School Counselor Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counseling Association Governing Council, and the American Psychoanalytic Association.<sup>3</sup> California, New Jersey, and Washington D.C. have already passed laws prohibiting state-licensed mental health professionals from engaging minors in conversion therapies. Fifteen other states have similar legislation currently pending. The claim that a therapist can change sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is both scientifically invalid and dangerous.

The president's administration recently announced it was similarly opposed to conversion therapy. In response to a petition by over 120,000 Americans opposed to the practice, Senior Advisor and Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement Valerie Jarrett wrote that, "[t]he overwhelming scientific evidence demonstrates that conversion therapy, especially when it is practiced on young people, is neither medically nor ethically appropriate and can cause substantial harm. ... [T]his Administration supports efforts to ban the use of conversion therapy for minors."<sup>4</sup> I believe this strong statement is not the only action the federal government can take in preventing the dangers of conversion therapy—federal agencies such as the FTC can and should play an active role as well.

As the official responsible for overseeing the FTC, I call on you to:

1. Investigate the claims and advertising practices of therapists who perform conversion therapy, to identify those that are making dangerous, scientifically invalid claims.
2. Enforce any applicable laws regarding false claims to prevent conversion therapists from misinforming parents, patients, and the public.
3. Properly assess the practice of conversion therapy as "unfair or deceptive."

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your response.

All the best,



Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>

<sup>4</sup> Jarrett, Valerie. "Petition Response: On Conversion Therapy," April 8, 2015.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/04/08/petition-response-conversion-therapy>